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Landlords and Sharecroppers in Wine Producing Regions: Beaujolais, Catalonia and Tuscany, 1800–1940¹

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ABSTRACT

The growing success of small family farms in Europe before 1930 was found alongside large estates. Tenanted estates enjoyed the advantages of the greater incentives of family farmers to maximize their production, and the economies of scale for marketing, credit or technical improvement of large exploitations. A particular case is the tenanted estates specialized in the production and marketing of wine and using sharecropping contracts. Technical changes, the increasing of scale economies in wine production, and the impact of Phylloxera after 1870 had an impact in the nature of the contract as landlords increasing the control on production. This paper compares the three specific cases of Beaujolais, Catalonia and Tuscany, where tenanted wine producing estates were common throughout this period, and the responses of owners and settlers to these changes in the long term.

Key words: sharecropping, wine history, winegrowers.

JEL Classification: D23, N53, N54, Q13, Q15.

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INTRODUCTION

The economic significance of sharecropping, a type of farming in which families rent small plots of land from a landowner in return for a portion of their crop, has been reinterpreted over the past couple of decades. A long tradition of considering the contract as an explanation of agrarian backwardness and an obstacle to economic development has been replaced by a more favourable view, as a useful contract for resolving problems associated with moral hazard or risk². The literature has insisted on the advantages of its use for a crop such as the vine, whose output is highly sensitive to the quality and timing of labour inputs and the fact that the plant can be easily and permanently damaged if the operations are badly carried out. Moreover, viticulture is very labour intensive and has been difficult to mechanize until recently. Studies on sharecropping in the Tuscan wine region since the Middle Ages, or in the Catalonia vineyard in the last two centuries, have shown the advantages of this contract, especially when compared to fixed-rent tenancy.³ However, a limit of these studies is that sharecropping is less common in European vineyards than the literature suggests.⁴ Certain difficulties exist with the contract, such as the problem of dividing the harvest, the risks associated with specializing in a commercial crop or moving up the quality ladder. In the first case, while the costs of supervising the quality of the sharecropper labour inputs are lower than for other types of contracts, those related to the division of the harvest can be very high, especially when wine quality is important. On the other hand, the fluctuation of grape production is much higher compared to

² Allen, Douglas W. and Dean Lueck, *The Nature of the Farm*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002).

³ Akerberg, D. and Maristella Botticini, 'The Choice of Agrarian Contracts in Early Renaissance Tuscany: Risk Sharing, Moral Hazard or Capital Market Imperfections?' *Explorations in Economic History* 37 (2000): 241–257, for Tuscany, Juan Carmona and James Simpson, "The Rabassa Morta in Catalan Viticulture: The Rise and Decline of a Long-Term Sharecropping Contract, 1670s–1920s", *The Journal of Economic History*, 59-2, (1999): 290–315; for Beaujolais, Philip Hoffman "The Economic Theory of Sharecropping in Early Modern France", *The Journal of Economic History*, 42-1, (1984): 155–62.

⁴ Carmona, Juan y James Simpson, "Explaining contract choice: vertical coordination, sharecropping, and wine in Europe, 1850–1950", *The Economic History Review*, 65-3, (2012): 887–909. Garrido, Samuel, Sharecropping was sometimes efficient: sharecropping with compensation for improvements in European viticulture", *The Economic History Review*, 70-3, (2017): 997

other products, and family farmers which tend to be risk averse will not specialize forcing the landowners to supply a multi-cropping farm to potential tenant. Finally, the preference of sharecropping over fixed-rent tenancy usually does not take account the possibility that the landowner is not indifferent to whether the rent is in kind or in cash, especially when grape quality is high. These factors could explain why sharecropping is less common in commercial viticulture, and that in certain cases landowners prefer to devise alternative labour contracts which can solve the problems associated with transaction costs with labour-intensive cultivation. Sharecropping is thus more often found in polyculture farms where the vineyard plays a complementary role.

The factors offered in the previous part explain why the sharecropping contract was common in a number of important wine regions such as Beaujolais in France, the Italian region of Tuscany (Chianti) or Catalonia in Spain, but mainly absent in others. Although the contract originated in the Middle Ages in Tuscany, and from the seventeenth century in the other two cases, they not only survived without major changes until 1940, but successfully helped displace other types of local wine producers, adapted to the profound changes in viticulture in this period, and were capable of producing premium wines. For the reasons we have already indicated, usual explanations are not enough to explain the survival of this form of organization, and we offer a different one. One crucial characteristic of wine production in these three regions was its concentration in large properties that centralize the production process of all or part of the harvest and to enjoy the advantages offered by the integration of the production of grape thanks to the nature of the contract which gave to the landowners' great freedom to control the production of sharecroppers. On the other hand, the three regions shared a particularly hilly landscape which made labour intensive viticulture and mechanization expensive. Moreover, the nature of the terrain led to high levels of human specificity and explains that most sharecroppers remained for very long periods on the same farm. This exogenously given long term contracts stand as most important difference with similar contracts in tropical plantations or even in the southern United States, where land flatness reduces monitoring costs allowing shorter contracts.

In this chapter we will first show the factors that explain the presence and absence of sharecropping in viticulture. Next we will show which types of contracts vineyard landowners could use to maintain the advantages offered by sharecropping without its disadvantages. Finally, we will show how the landowners of Beaujolais, Tuscany and Catalonia solved the problems of division of harvest, specialization and wine production in a context of technical change. We will take especial attention to the role of the supervision of sharecroppers in order to favour technical change and the reduction of transaction costs.

SHARECROPPING AND VITICULTURE

The family farm is the most widespread form of organisation in agriculture because of the low costs of supervising labour. In farming, output is highly sensitive to the timing and quality of effort, and often deficiencies in these areas only become apparent after the harvest. Even then, it can be difficult to determine whether a poor crop was caused by the worker's negligence or by exogenous factors such as adverse weather conditions.⁵ The family farm provides strong incentives for labour to carry out tasks diligently and members can acquire over time important human asset specific skills linked to their land, which allows them to be more productive than if they have to keep changing farms each year.⁶ Furthermore, until recently there were few economies of scale in most types of agriculture, allowing the family farm to compete successfully with large estates or plantations.⁷ In addition, the fact that workers prefer to work their own land in order to increase their incomes and gain security for old age implies that in traditional economies the majority of farms are worked by their owners. Therefore, in order to be viable, land or labor contracts have to replicate the advantages that family farms enjoy. The major advantage of rental contracts is that they provide the best incentives for farmers to maximise output, but not to maintain soil fertility, or care for fixed assets (buildings, trees,

⁵ Allen and Lueck, *The Nature*, 6—7; Yujiro Hayami and Keijiro Otsuka, *The Economics of Contract Choice. An Agrarian Perspective* (Oxford, Clarendon: 1993), 12—16.

⁶ For asset specificity, Oliver Williamson, *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism: Firms, Markets, and Relational Contracting* (New York, Free Press: 1985), 242.

⁷ Ray, Debraj, *Development Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1998), 453—55; Hayami and Otsuka, *The Economics of Contract Choice*, 6—7.

vines, etc.) compared, for instance, to small landowner cultivators.⁸ Wage labour, at the other end of the spectrum of contract choice, provides fewer incentives to apply a sufficient effort and care for fixed assets without the need for careful supervision. Sharecropping, by contrast falls between these extremes, and the literature provides two broad additional explanations for the contract: risk-sharing, and the presence of market imperfections for inputs other than land.

Agriculture is a risky economic activity, not just because of output sensitivity to weather or disease, but also because price variability can have a big impact on farm income. National and international market integration can increase income variability as a poor harvest is no longer offset by high local prices. In this sense, the advantage of sharecropping compared to fixed rental tenancies, is that it shifts part of the risk of harvest or price failure to a less risk averse landowners.⁹ However, there are a number of objections to the tenant's risk aversion as being the determining factor in contract choice. First, fixed rent tenants can expect to be helped in case of poor harvests.¹⁰ Second, recent studies have questioned that sharecroppers are more risk averse than fixed rent tenants or even the landowners. Small owner-occupiers typically reduce risk by using the family endowments of land, labour and capital to produce a variety of different income streams, a characteristic found especially in the case of wine, whose output fluctuated considerably more than other crops. In France, as in Spain or Italy, most vineyards were minuscule and worked by part-time producers.¹¹ Therefore, if large landowners want to attract potential tenants,

⁸ Allen and Lueck, *The Nature*, 58–61.

⁹ French literature noted the expansion of the contract in times of difficulties. In Connord, Fabien, *La terre des autres. Le métayage en France depuis 1889* (Montrouge, Editions du Bourg : 2018), 98–9.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Griffiths and Marc Overton, *Farming to Halves. The Hidden History of Sharefarming in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (Basingstoke, Palgrave: 2009), 127–30.

¹¹ In France there were 1.6 million hectares of vines and 1.6 million growers in the 1900s. Marcel Lachiver, *Vins, vignes et vignerons. Histoire du vignoble français* (Paris, Fayard : 1988), 583. Vine scattering was an additional risk-minimizing device in Italy. Giovanni Federico and Pablo Martinelli, “Italy to 1938”, in *Wine Globalization: A New Comparative History*, ed. Kym Anderson and Vicente Pinilla, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 190–91.

they had to allow multi-cropping (polyculture) in sufficiently large holding or to permit sharecroppers to work outside the exploitation, despite this increasing monitoring costs. For this reason, it was common in France and Tuscany to offer farms large enough to employ the sharecropper's family full time, and prohibit them from working elsewhere.

A second kind of explanations are related to transaction costs. For Alfred Marshall, transaction costs with sharecropping were particularly high, because neither the landowner nor tenant received the full marginal return from increased labour and capital inputs, encouraging both to be undersupplied.¹² However, the transaction costs associated with effort are actually less on a family farm worked by sharecroppers, than using wage labour. More recently, transactions costs explanations have been used for preferring sharecropping contracts instead of tenancy when it is possible to damage fixed assets which affect future harvests (buildings, trees, soil, etc.). For example, with a crop such as the vine, output is highly sensitive to the quality and timing of labour inputs and the plant itself can be easily and permanently damaged if the pruning, ploughing, and hoeing operations are badly carried out.¹³ This explains why rental contracts were not common in viticulture, while the use of wage labour was rare because the close monitoring required to reduce the risks of opportunistic behaviour of the workers was too costly for most landowners.¹⁴ However, the relatively high figures for vineyards under fixed rent tenancy contracts found in French statistics in 1892 (8%) suggests that the effect was limited in certain contexts.¹⁵ Sharecropping also created transaction costs associated with the division of the harvest, which was an important factor in limiting its use with viticulture.¹⁶ If the division took place in the vineyard, the landowner needed to be present to avoid theft, and ensure that the different varieties, together with under- and over-ripe fruit, were divided equally between

¹² Alfred Marshall., *Principles of Economics : An Introductory Volume* (Basingstoke: 1890 [1990]), 534—37..

¹³ Carmona and Simpson, 'Rabassa Morta', 292—3.

¹⁴ See especially Jules Guyot, *Étude des vignobles de France pour servir à l'enseignement mutuel de la viticulture et de la vinification françaises* (Paris: 1868), vol.3, 292—3.

¹⁵ Garrido "Sharecropping", 980.

¹⁶ Allen and Lueck, *The Nature of the Farm*, 53—55.

the two parties. For exogenous reasons, vineyards were usually highly fragmented, and the landowner would have considerable difficulties in monitoring a number of geographically dispersed plots throughout the village since most were located only on certain part of the hillsides (generally south-facing), and on marginal land. The grapes then needed to be transported quickly to the landowner's cellar to avoid fermentation. A less time-critical moment for dividing the harvest was after fermentation, but the possibilities for sharecroppers to cheat were even greater. Wine could be stolen, and the small scale of production implied that there were usually plenty of wine-making facilities in a village for sharecroppers to hide part of their harvest from the landowner. As wine quality varied considerably, and good wine could be removed before the division by a dishonest tenant and replaced with poorer wines brought from elsewhere or even by inferior wines obtained from the second pressing, such as *vinello* in Italy. Landowners were obliged to accept them as rental payment from their tenants, unlike the merchants, who could reject inferior wines

Market imperfections for factor inputs like technical know-how, managerial skills or capital provide a third type of explanations. Farm management might involve not only organising the timing of activities such as the start of the harvest, but also planning responses to exogenous shifts in factor and commodity prices, or the appearance of new biological or labour-saving technologies, skills that were not easily accessible to sharecroppers.¹⁷ Capital market imperfections is another explanation when tenants were too poor to accept fixed rental contracts, and sharecropping allowed landowners to advance farm equipment and working capital, with the future harvest used as security.¹⁸ However sharecroppers on occasions also had access to credit markets, or perhaps because they owned some land, while over time market imperfection might be eliminated, leading to sharecropping disappearing locally.¹⁹

¹⁷ Roumasset, "The Nature of the Agricultural Firm", 161—77.

¹⁸ Ray, *Development Economics*, 564—68 ; Hayami and Otsuka, *The Economics of Contract Choice*, chapter 5.

¹⁹ Connord, *La terre des autres*, 48—51.

By contrast, too little attention has been given to two other factors that influence the nature of contracts in viticulture. First, contract choice needs to be linked to the nature of vertical co-operation and integration associated with the production and marketing arrangements of individual crops and livestock. The literature assumes that the landowner was indifferent to receiving payment in cash or kind, but while this might have been the case with crops like cereals where spot markets existed, it was not with crops which required immediate processing demanding a high degree of vertical coordination. Therefore, decisions on contract choice sometimes carried important implications on the extent that they were to be involved in downstream operations associated with processing and marketing farm produce. A second factor is the role of human asset specificity in long term contracts. These contracts allowed sharecroppers to become more productive as they accumulated human asset specificity linked to the land, which encouraged them to undertake non-observable investments, especially important as new biological technologies were often needed just to maintain yields.²⁰ These restrictions are especially important in the case of vines, which were often grown on hillsides under specific conditions and difficult to mechanize until the 1950s. Long term contracts reduced the incentives for tenants to overexploit assets, such as existed with short-term ones. Long term contracts and high human asset specificity have however an important drawback, which is the absence of a farm ladder or life-time earning patterns. It implied therefore that stable lifetime incomes for tenants, and a guaranteed skilled labour force for the landowner, could end suddenly if the contract was brought to a premature conclusion.²¹

CONTRACT CHOICE IN COMERCIAL VITICULTURE SINCE 1850

²⁰ Oriana Bandiera, 'Contract Duration and Investment Incentives: Evidence from Land Tenancy Agreements', *Journal of the European Economic Association* 5, no. 5 (2007), 956–7 stresses the importance of non-observable investments.

²¹ In the US South, the contract is usually explained as a rung on a farm ladder that saw the tenant move from labourer, to sharecropper, tenant and finally landowner, as they accumulated capital, skills and reputation over their working life. Lee Alston and Joseph Ferrie, 'Time on the Ladder: Career Mobility in Agriculture, 1890– 1938,' *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 4 (2005), 1058–1081.

Problems such as the division of harvest, the tenant's desire to multi-crop to reduce risk, or the monitoring of effort on highly fragmented plots, all help explain why sharecropping was comparatively rare. In France, according to the official statistics, only 8.3% of the total area of vines in 1892 were cultivated using sharecropping contracts, and these were concentrated in a few regions.²² Spanish statistics on contract choice are very poor, but sharecropping appears to have been rare, and geographically highly concentrated.²³ In Italy, sharecropping was more widespread, but rarely used in commercial viticulture, despite the crop representing 20% of total agricultural output in 1911.²⁴ Therefore, how were vines cultivated if sharecropping was so rare? By far the most common were owner-occupiers who made their own wines, generally of low quality, using only family labour. However, fine wines were often made on large estates, and specific labour contracts were more common than sharecropping or fixed rent tenancy. Finally, from 1860 technological change allowed significant scale economies in viticulture and the possibility to enjoy low cost production even using wage labour and sharecropping occasionally.

The typical organization structure in the late nineteenth century was a family operated vineyard making its own wine, much of it consumed by the family. Increasing amounts however were sold to wholesale merchants, who blended it for the hundreds of thousands of small retailers in urban areas to be sold as common wine.²⁵ Fine wine production was organized differently, since there was a strictly limited area of favourable land to produce them, and considerable care was required in carrying out the different activities. This led to landowners creating sophisticated labour contracts to resolve problems of moral hazard and monitoring, and creating incentives for vineyard workers to acquire, and utilise, human asset specificity. Fine wine production also needed large amounts of capital as producers deliberately reduced output to improve quality, and high quality winery equipment was needed.²⁶ Sharecropping could have

²² Connord, *La terre des autres*, 44–48.

²³ Zoilo Espejo, *Costumbres de derecho y economía rural*, (Madrid, 1900).

²⁴ Federico and Martinelli, “Italy to 1938”, table 5.1.

²⁵ Sempé, *Régime Économique Du Vin. Production, Consommation, Échange* (Bordeaux and Paris, 1898), 104–06.

²⁶ Carmona and Simpson, “Explaining Contract Choice”, 896.

provided the high levels of human asset specificity that were required, but its use was absent in Bordeaux and Champagne, and vineyard workers lacked the skills and capital required to transform quality grapes into fine wine. Fine wine producers also wanted to protect their brand names, and therefore did not want sharecroppers to be able to sell their share on the market. As a result, the landowner kept the whole harvest and hired skilled wine-makers, while vineyard workers received high wages. In Bordeaux, the *prix-faiteurs* were given the responsibility on the large estates for all the skilled operations on a fixed area of vines. In Burgundy it was the *vigneron a prix d'argent*, while the Champagne *maisons* outsourced the production of their grapes to small growers, although under their supervision.²⁷

But even in the case of common wine, new technologies changed the nature of vineyard supervision and reduced transaction costs between 1860 and 1914, encouraging the creation of large estates and use of wage labour and sometimes sharecropping contracts, especially in the French Midi.²⁸ In the Midi, economies of scale began to be important on vineyards of over 30 hectares that were established on the fertile plains rather than the hills, and growers used large quantities of pesticides, fungicides, artificial fertilisers, irrigation, and light pruning to improve yields (Carmona y Simpson 2012). As wine prices fell relative to wages from the late nineteenth century, some landowners turned to sharecropping contracts to reduce costs. However, in the years of poor harvests and low prices in the early 1900s, landowners were obliged to provide a guaranteed salary to their sharecroppers, limiting the interest in the contract.²⁹

These factors suggest why sharecropping contracts were not widely used in commercial vine cultivation. Yet in a few important wine regions, notably Beaujolais in France, Tuscany (Chianti) in Italy, and Catalonia in Spain, sharecropping was the most common contract. Furthermore, it managed to survive the profound technical and commercial changes in wine production over several centuries, and remained important until after the Second World War.

²⁷ Carmona and Simpson, “Explaining Contract Choice”, 896–98.

²⁸ James Simpson, *Creating Wine. The Emergence of a World Industry, 1840–1914*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press:2011).

²⁹ Carmona and Simpson, “Explaining Contract Choice”, 903.

At first glance, this could be the only element in common for the very different contracts, especially with respect to the degree of specialization and the share of the production delivered to the owner. Nevertheless, sharecroppers in all three regions worked for large landowners who centralized the production process of all or part of the harvest, and produced a medium quality wine for the market. The rest of the chapter shows how this type of organization solved the problems of transaction costs associated with the supervision of work, management, and the division of the harvest, together with the incentive structure for sharecroppers.

The vigneronnage.

The vineyards of Beaujolais were close to navigable water and viticulture from the seventeenth century grew rapidly in response to the Parisian market (map 1). The region, in particular Haut (northern) Beaujolais where the hillside was especially steep, benefited from a growing reputation and high prices from the mid nineteenth century.³⁰ Sharecropping represented between 30 and 40 per cent of all vines of the département of Rhône in 1882, but reached 80 per cent in the district of Villefranche-sur-Saône, in the north.³¹ Beaujolais wines, although inferior to French fine wines, were called *le grand ordinaire de France*, and large landowners using sharecropping obtained prices that were at least double what owner-occupiers achieved in the same region, with the difference increasing between 1850 and 1940.³² From the 18th century, just as in Catalonia, landowners started to market their own wine.³³ In fact, land concentration and sharecroppers continued to increase from the late nineteenth

³⁰ Gilbert Garrier, *Paysans Du Beaujolais Et Du Lyonnais: 1800—1970*. (Grenoble, 1973), vol.1, 270, notes that planting vines (the *minage*) cost between eight and ten times more than further south.

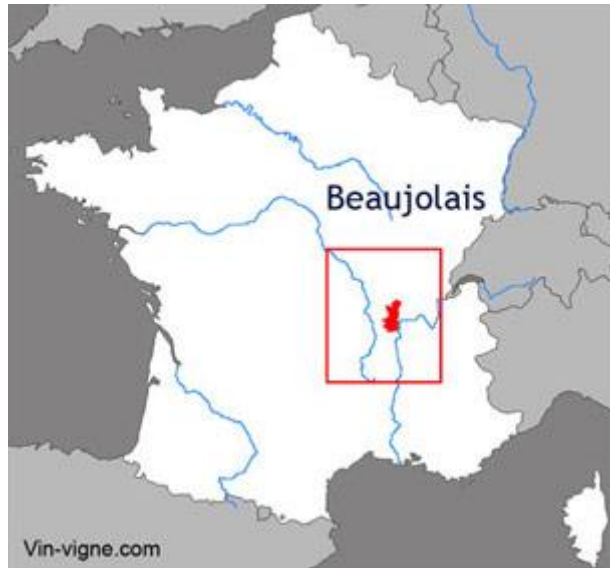
³¹ Pierre Galet, *Les vignobles de France, vol. 1 : Méditerranée, Rhône-Alpes, Bourgogne, Franche-Comté, Alsace-Lorraine*, (Paris, Éd. Tec & doc: 2004), vol.1 1100. The area of vineyards in Villefranche increased fourfold from 6,643 hectares in 1927, to 26,396 in 1905.

³² Jacques Burel, *Le Vignoble Beaujolais* (Lyon: 1941), 71—2.

³³ Garrier, *Paysans*, vol.1, 138.

century until 1940, especially for the better wines.³⁴ By contrast, sharecropping stopped being used for cereal production in the same area from around 1800.³⁵

MAP 1.



Source: Meloni and Swinnen, *Trade and Terroir*, Figure 8.

A typical property in Beaujolais had between 12 and 40 hectares of vines, which were sub-divided and cultivated by between five and fifteen sharecroppers in standard units called *vigneronnage*.³⁶ Tenants were given about two hectares of vines, and one and half hectares of pasture for livestock, sufficient to keep a family and domestic servant fully employed. The sharecropper was required to reside on farm, and the family prohibited from working elsewhere. Although the milk, butter and cheese production was of poor quality, they provided an important dietary supplement, and helped them survive phylloxera or moments of abnormally low wine prices.³⁷ If the sharecropper owned land themselves, they were expected to rent it to others.³⁸ Landowners were responsible for all the major production decisions, including the choice of grape varieties and pruning methods used, as well as the timing

³⁴ Especially during the mid-19th century. Garrier, *Paysans.*, vol.1, 605 and vol.2, table 6.

³⁵ Garrier, *Paysans.*, vol.1, 269.

³⁶ François Myard, *Le vigneronnage en Beaujolais* (Lyon, 1907).

³⁷ Humbert Chatillon, *Le Beaujolais Viticole* (Paris: 1906), 67.

³⁸ Cheysson, *L'habitation du metayer vigneron du beaujolais autrefois et aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1899), 221.

and methods to be used in replanting after phylloxera (1875–90), the degree of mechanisation, and when to begin the grape harvest.³⁹ Landowners often advanced capital because of the high cost of harvesting for the sharecropper, and sometimes crops destruction by hails. However the role of the sharecropper was decisive. The hills and the high density of vines made viticulture in Beaujolais especially labour intensive and mechanisation expensive. The sharecropper was responsible not just for working the vines, but also in supervising the harvest and wine making, which could involve as many as twenty people, and was required to be married, so that his wife would provide food for the workers.⁴⁰ Contracts were annual, but the hilly nature of the terrain led to high levels of human specificity, and explains why most sharecroppers remained for long periods, sometimes for several generations, on the same farm.⁴¹

The landowner played a crucial part in the wine making process. The harvest was collected rapidly, and sharecroppers made the wine using their own equipment although, to avoid cheating, this was always located within the landowner's winery. Sharecroppers were not allowed to have wine making equipment in their own cellars, and the wineries of large estates had to accommodate more than a dozen of wine presses.⁴² Wine-making was managed personally by the landowner or their agent, and the wine from each vat after fermentation was divided by somebody considered independent, with the landowner and sharecropper both present.⁴³ Only then could the sharecropper take possession of their wine, to either sell in the market or to the

³⁹ Myard, *Vigneronnage*, 208–9. Connord, *La terre des autres*, 52, the increasing landowner participation in sharecroppers' expenses.

⁴⁰ Myard, *Vigneronnage*, 193. The harvest represented about 25 to 30% of the sharecropper's annual farm costs. Garrier, *Paysans*, vol. 1, 391.

⁴¹ Garrier, *Paysans*, vol. 1, 152–3. An enquiry carried out in 1898 showed that some families were working the same farm for more than 150 years. Myard, *Vigneronnage*, 305.

⁴² Paul Ferrouillat and Charvet, *Les celliers: construction et matériel vinicole avec la description des principaux celliers du Midi, du Bordelais, de la Bourgogne et de l'Algérie* (Montpellier; Paris, 1896), 380 and Cheysson, *L'habitation*, 230.

⁴³ Myard, *Vigneronnage*, p.193.

landowner.⁴⁴ Although these measures helped reduce monitoring costs associated with dividing the harvest, they increased production costs compared to large growers without sharecroppers.⁴⁵

An important feature of the contract for landowners was that labour costs were born by the sharecroppers, including those of the harvest and wine making. Therefore, when the poor harvests and exceptionally low prices of the 1900s ruined many sharecroppers, landowners had to offer a different contract called *grands gages*, which guaranteed a salary.⁴⁶ These contracts were similar to the *prix-fait* found in Bordeaux or the *vigneron a prix d'argent* in Burgundy, although they contained only limited incentives for good work for the sharecropper. While both landowners and tenants might have preferred sharecropping contracts, fixed wage contracts were an acceptable substitute when market conditions were especially volatile, and tenants required a guaranteed income.

Finally, the *vignerons* might have preferred to be landowner-occupiers themselves. In fact, sharecroppers owned very little land, just 1,5 % of the Beaujolais land market during the nineteenth century, less than day labourers.⁴⁷ Sharecroppers were able to save money after the First World War, but land concentration continued to increase during the interwar period. ⁴⁸ Not only did small growers lack the skills to produce quality wine and the capital to establish a cellar, but there were economies of scale associated with marketing it.⁴⁹ One possibility was to move down the quality ladder, which had the added advantage of requiring less labour. Indeed, on the plains of the Bas-Beaujolais, which were well suited to mechanisation and producing large quantities of cheap wines,

⁴⁴ Garrier, *Paysans*, vol. 1, pp.390.

⁴⁵ Wine making at Château Malescot in Bordeaux in the late nineteenth century for example cost 437 francs per hectare, against 657 francs on the Deleche estate. Ferrouillat and Charvet, *Les Celliers*, 360 and 388.

⁴⁶ Vermorel and Danguy, *Les vins du Beaujolais, du Maconnais et du Chalonnais.*, (Dijon, 1894), 17 and Myard, *Vigneronnage*, 262—3.

⁴⁷ Garrier, *Paysans*, vol.1, 360.

⁴⁸ Garrier, *Paysans*, vol.1, 605.

⁴⁹ Hubert Clique, *Les Caves Coopératives De Vinification En Bourgogne* (Paris: 1931), 97 and 141.

sharecropping was less common and disappeared after 1900. However, the area of vines here also declined, because production costs were high compared to those of the Midi with which it competed.⁵⁰ Sharecropping in Beaujolais was therefore linked to the production of better quality wines requiring the presence of a specialist wine maker to supervise operations, and the need for a labour intensive viticulture to provide a supply of suitable grapes. Yet the northern Beaujolais was an exception: its wines were superior to most other French wines (although inferior to those of Bordeaux or Burgundy where direct cultivation was practiced). Landowners were highly active in monitoring both the grape and wine making process, as well as selling the wines.⁵¹ Sharecroppers preferred increasing human asset specificity than moving to other wine-producing regions and becoming owner-occupiers. Despite the advantages, landowners in times of low prices had to be prepared to guarantee a salary to attract and retain workers.

The *rabassa morta*.

The *rabassa morta* began to be used throughout Catalonia from the end of the seventeenth century to meet the rapid expansion in demand for wines and spirits. Most contracts were found in the districts where vines were planted on the hillsides, especially in the province Barcelona and parts of Tarragona. In many municipalities, such as the Penedès, between 60 to 80% of all vines were cultivated by sharecroppers in 1920 (map 2).⁵² Landowners were able to obtain a common wine of better quality and price compared to those produced by the new large cooperatives which started appearing during the first third of the 20th century and, despite the intense conflicts that confronted *rabassers* with the

⁵⁰ After the phylloxera, vineyards in the *Bas Beaujolais* declined by 25 % compared to an increase of 18% in Villefranche. Garrier, *Paysans*, vol.1, 429.

⁵¹ According to Goujon, most of them were négociants, or needed a professional manager to supervise the cellar. Paul Goujon, *La cave et le grenier: vignobles du Chalonais et du Maconnais au XIXe siècle* (Lyon, 1989), 216.

⁵² According to Raimon Soler-Becerro, *Viticultura, desigualtat i conflicte agrari. La lluita per la terra a la Catalunya vitícola, 1900–1936*, (URV, 2019), Annex 5, in 26 villages of Penedès.

landowners, the contract seems to have reached its greatest geographical extension in the 1930s.⁵³

MAPA 2.



Source: Colomé et alii, “The *Rabassaire* Struggle, Figure 3. Based on Instituto de Reformas Sociales, *La Rabassa morta*, cartograma. The shaded area shows the district where viticulture was the dominant crop and more than half cultivated using the rabassa contract.

The *rabassa morta* contracts originally required the grower or *rabasser* to clear the land, normally marginal and wooded, and to plant vines within a fixed period (usually between two and ten years), to cultivate them in accordance with the customs of the region and to hand over between 1/5 and 1/3 of the annual harvest to the owner.⁵⁴ The farms covered between 2 and 4 hectares, often in different plots cultivated by a single sharecropper. The contracts were originally valid until two-thirds of the vines had died and, in theory, this implied that the contacts were indefinite, lasting for generations.⁵⁵

⁵³ Juan Carmona and James Simpson, “Cuando el rentista no es derrotado. El caso de la rabassa catalán, 1890–1936”. WP Historia Económica, (Instituto Figuerola- UC3M, 2020), table 1

⁵⁴ Emili Giralt, “El conflicto “rabassaire” y la cuestión agraria en Cataluña hasta 1936”, *Revista de trabajo*, 7, (1964), 51–72.

⁵⁵ Hence the Catalan name, *rabassa morta*, meaning dead vine.

Several reasons explain how the contract was successful in reducing the different types of transaction costs associated with sharecropping. On the one hand the absence of economies of scale in traditional viticulture and the scale of wine making was low enough to allow sharecroppers to produce their own wine.⁵⁶ Moreover, by guaranteeing a separated possession of the vines from the land, including the right to sell them, the contract provided strong motivation for its proper care. Monitoring was therefore enforced through the market, and gave ‘high powered’ incentives to apply more labour in the vineyard rather than in other activities, in contrast to Beaujolais.⁵⁷ The use of a sharecropping instead of a fixed-rent tenancy contract had a major advantage in that it avoided the problem of establishing a rent which satisfied both tenants and landlord. It also allowed landowners the necessary grapes to produce and sell their own wine.⁵⁸ Finally the application of the contract, generally oral, rested on the existence of a social capital that avoided short-term opportunism and ensured the survival of the contract for generations.⁵⁹ It should be emphasized that the clearing of the marginal land to plant the vines, and the fact that a vineyard took at least four years to produce a substantial harvest, explains both the low rent and the relatively high value of the vineyard compared to the land.

Land concentration in the wine districts was very high and increasing, allowing the landowners, even if receiving a relatively small share of the total harvest, to be in the position to process a significant amount of wine. Initially, quality was not relevant, because exports from the region consisted of *aguardiente* (spirits), rather than. However, the building of new roads connecting the vineyards with Barcelona and other ports by the early nineteenth century allowed growers to switch to the production of table wines, thereby obtaining better prices. Better quality wines were initially achieved without technological change, but wine production was increasingly centralized in the

⁵⁶ Carmona and Simpson, “The Rabassa Morta”, 297.

⁵⁷ Carmona and Simpson, “The Rabassa Morta”, 293.

⁵⁸ Carmona and Simpson, “Explaining Contract Choice”, Among recent works, Garrido, “Sharecropping” or Josep Colomé, Jordi Planas, Raimon Soler-Becerro and Valls-Junyent, “The *Rabassaire* Struggle: Long Term Analysis of a Social and Political Movement”, *International Review of Social History* (2018), ignored the role of landlord as winegrowers.

⁵⁹ Carmona and Simpson, “The Rabassa Morta”, 294.

wineries of the *mas*, under the supervision of a *masover*, with the landowner, who usually lived locally, also taking an active role.⁶⁰ The appearance of new vine diseases and pests, especially the destruction of the entire vineyard by phylloxera between 1880 and 1900, led to greater involvement of growers in grape production. Landowners and sharecroppers maintained the contract, despite the opportunity offered to the landlords to recover the land when two thirds of the vines died. However, the planting and cultivation of the new American strains was more capital intensive and needed chemical fertilizers, which further increased the intervention of the landowner.⁶¹ As in Tuscany or Beaujolais, the particularities of a mountainous orography which made mechanization difficult, explains the importance of the human capital specificity and therefore the landlord's interest to maintain the long duration of the contracts.⁶²

Despite the difficulties created by low wine prices during the interwar period, the landowners' wineries using the *rabassa morta* contract were more successful than the cooperative wineries that spread throughout the Catalan wine-growing areas from the early 20th century.⁶³ As in Tuscany, cooperatives had more difficulties to establish themselves in areas of sharecropping. These cooperatives, despite having modern facilities and enjoying enormous economies of scale, had problems competing with low costs regions such as La Mancha. In particular, while Catalan cooperatives failed to supply economic incentives to independent growers to improve grape quality, large growers using sharecropping contracts were able to internalize the quality through vertical integration of the different farms in their property. The *rabassa morta* contract clauses allowed the landowner to enter the farm in order to supervise the different tasks, to fix the harvest date, and to control the wine processing in the

⁶⁰ Most landlords were growers who advertised in the trade directories and sold in Barcelona's expanding market (Carmona y Simpson, 2020). The residence of landowners based on Soler-Becerro, *Viticultura*, annex 2.

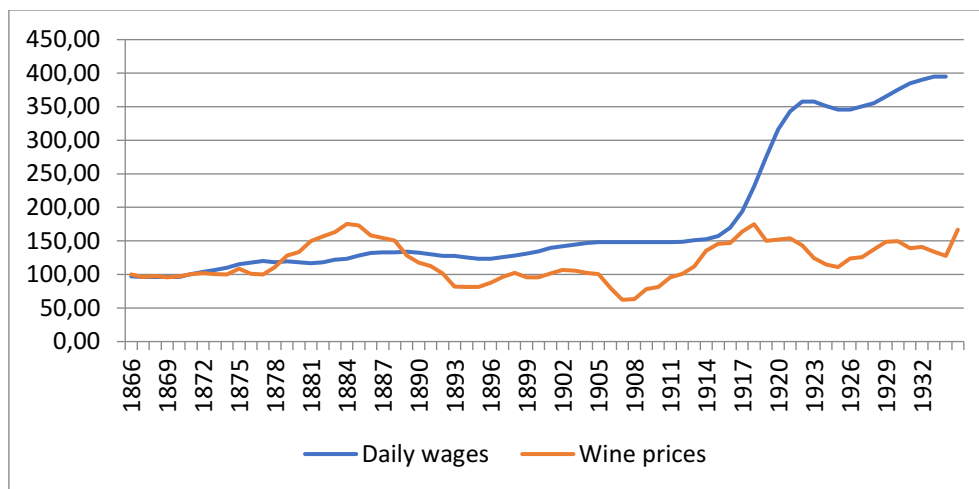
⁶¹ Carmona y Simpson, "The Rabassa Morta", 303–4.

⁶² Giralt, "El Conflicto", 56–57.

⁶³ For Catalan cooperatives, Jordi Planas, "Els inicis del cooperativisme vitivinícola", ed. Colomé et alii, *Vinyes, vins i cooperativisme vitivinícola a Catalunya*, (Abadia de Montserrat: 2015), 369–401.

vats of each sharecropper.⁶⁴ This supervision benefited indirectly the rabassers themselves, allowing them to produce better quality wines and explaining their reluctance to join the cooperatives, considering that their product was of better quality.⁶⁵ Landowners were also able to make marketing decisions autonomously, having the ability to control their product, while cooperative managers usually struggled to justify their decisions before the partners given the large prices fluctuations.⁶⁶

Figure 1. Trend in wine prices and wages in Barcelona, 1866–1934



Source: Simpson and Carmona, *Why Democracy Failed*, Figure 9.1.

However, as in Tuscany, the increasing costs of chemical products and depressing wine prices from the early twentieth century decreased the return on unit labour input in viticulture compared to what unskilled wage labour in industry could earn, especially in the rapidly growing city of Barcelona whose population quadruplicated between 1887 and 1930 (Figure 1). Although yields per hectare were somewhat higher than in other areas of Catalonia, unlike the

⁶⁴ Mancomunitat de Catalunya, *Projecte de regulació dels censos, rabassa morta i terratge a Catalunya* (Barcelona: 1923), 38–47, Instituto de reformas sociales, *La 'Rabassa morta' y su reforma*, (Madrid:1923).

⁶⁵ Jordi Planas, *Viticultura i cooperativisme. La comarca d'Igualada, 1890–1939*, (Barcelona, Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat: 2013), 384–85, notes that few sharecroppers joined cooperatives.

⁶⁶ Simpson, *Creating Wine*, 74.

Beaujolais there is no evidence that the price differential obtained by the landowners increased during the interwar period and made it possible to compensate for the fall in the relative prices of wine with respect to labour.⁶⁷ The fact that sharecroppers processed a greater share of the harvest, and their autonomy explain that, unlike the Tuscan case, the demands of sharecropper organizations such as the *Union de Rabassers* created in 1923, were not limited to an improvement of the expenses and products distribution, preserving the centralized processing system, but adopted a more radical stance with the demand of a full land ownership at the expenses of the farms unity.⁶⁸ As a result, the passing in 1934 of a Land reform legislation (*Llei de contractes de conreu*) brought the possibility for sharecroppers to substitute the payment of rent in grapes for another in cash and to redeem their farm and which would have supposed the potential disappearance of the large private wineries.⁶⁹

THE MEZZADRIA PODERALE IN TUSCANY

The *mezzadria poderale*, was a medieval sharecropping contract, widely found in the provinces of central Italy, particularly in the mountainous regions of Tuscany, Umbria and Marche. In a similar way to the large French *métairies*, farmers practiced a multi-cropping (polyculture) and self-sufficient agriculture. In the case of Tuscany, and more specifically in the Chianti regions of Florence, Arezzo, Pisa and Siena, there was a growing trend towards wine specialization and the expansion of the contract between 1830 and 1940, while preserving the multi-cropping characteristics of the contract. Chianti, as in the case of Beaujolais, sold at a higher price than common wine, with a premium of up to

⁶⁷ Tenants would complain for the landlord's failure to get good prices.

⁶⁸ A different interpretation is based on the increasing autonomy of the sharecroppers. For example, Ramon Garrabou, Jordi Planas and Enric Sagner, "Sharecropping and management of large rural estates in contemporary Catalonia", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 28, 3, (2001) 101. But the role of the landowner as grower is again completely ignored.

⁶⁹ Carmona and Simpson, "Cuando el rentista", 22–28.

100% in the 1930s, and in Italy in 1938 it represented 34% of premium wine produced in wineries of more than 500Hl.⁷⁰

Tuscany was a region of large estates, most of them being organized in self-sufficient farms (called *podere*) cultivated by sharecroppers (*mezzadri*), around an administrative centre (*fattorie*) with processing facilities. Despite its medieval origin, the maximum expansion of the *fattorie* occurs in recent times, quadrupling their number between 1830 and 1930 in Florence and reaching more than 60% of the province's cultivated area.⁷¹ In Tuscany, 60% of the *fattorie* had more than 500 hectares, but in the more specialized wine-growing areas (such as Florence) the average was just 100 hectares with 10 *poderes* each⁷². Sharecroppers were offered annual contracts, varying in size from 6 to 26 hectares, sufficient to support a family and perhaps a few farm servants, although larger farms were rarer in wine growing areas.⁷³ The sharecropper was required to reside on the farm and, as in Beaujolais, the family prohibited from working elsewhere.⁷⁴ The *fattorie* usually produced variety of products, especially wheat, wine and olive oil, but the weight of each of them varied locally, and wine in the case of Chianti could represent a larger share of the production value in 1900.

MAP 3.

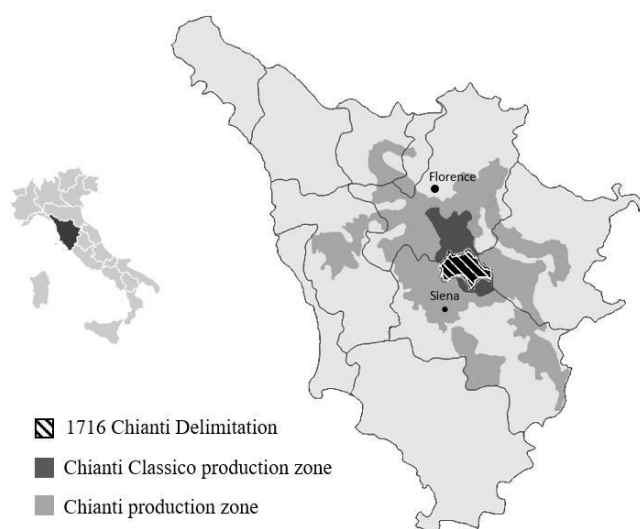
⁷⁰ Istituto Centrale di Statistica del Regno d'Italia, *Annuario Statistico dell'Agricoltura italiana 1936–1938*, (Roma, 1939), 103. The % of quality wine in Federico and Martinelli, Italy to 1938, table 5.4.

⁷¹ Rogari, Sandro, *Le campagne toscane nel ventennio postunitario. Rivista di storia dell'agricoltura*, vol. 2, 2009, pp. 99–107, 103; Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *Annuario Statistico*, 103, and Ministro per la Costituente, *Rapporto della Commissione economica*, (Roma, 1947), 213.

⁷² The Riccoli, one of the best known, had 2,000 hectares in 3 *fattorie* in 1838. Giuliana Biagioli, "Storie di aziende agrarie", in *Marche*. 7 (2016), 169–191, 177.

⁷³ Galassi, F. «Stasi e sviluppo nell'agricoltura toscana, 1870–1914: primisultati di uno studio aziendale», *Rivista di storia economica*, 3, (1986) pp. 304–337. Giuliana Biagioli, "La mezzadria poderale nell'Italia centro-settentrionale in età moderna e contemporanea (secoli xv-xx)", *Rivista di storia dell'agricoltura*, 42-2 (2002), 83.

⁷⁴ Biagioli, "La mezzadria poderale", 54–5



Source: Meloni and Swinnen, *Trade and Terroir*, Figure 6.

Although sharecroppers enjoyed an ample autonomy to choose the crops, landowners could ask to increase the production of more commercial ones. Landowners could modify the size of the *podere* in order to adapt them to the introduction of a more labour-intensive crops, or a smaller family and, in certain cases, they supplied basic food in exchange for an increase in the production of commercial crops.⁷⁵ Landowners, with the increased commercialization of Tuscan wines in the national and international market from the last third of the 19th century, started to play a greater role in key production decisions, such as the choice of grape varieties needed to produce Chianti, the pruning system used or the control of the harvest.⁷⁶ The *fattorie* were equipped with technicians or administrators, in addition to the involvement of the landowners themselves.⁷⁷ Unlike in Beaujolais or Penedès, the vine was a promiscuous crop, especially in the Chianti production areas (99% of the vineyards of Florence in 1929) and the destruction by phylloxera

⁷⁵ Luporini and Parigi, “Multi-task Sharecropping Contracts: The Italian Mezzadria”. *Economica*, 63, (1996), 445–57. Biagioli, “Storie di aziende”, 185, Snowden, Frank, *The Fascist Revolution in Tuscany 1919–1922*, (Cambridge, CUP: 1989), 28

⁷⁶ Ricasoli's role in the definition of the varieties of grapes that make up the ‘Chianti Classico’ was crucial Biagioli, 2000. The Chianti and sharecropping, in Luca Mocarelli and Vaquero Piñeiro, “Viticulture in the Italy of the Mezzadria”, *A History of Wine in Europe*, (edited by Conca Messina). (Palgrave: 2018), 232–36; on pruning, Galassi, “Stasi I Sviluppo”, 322.

⁷⁷ In 1902, the demands for reform, called for a greater sharecropper participation in the major production decisions. Snowden, *The Fascist Revolution*, 52. Ministro, *Rapporto*, 214–15,

was delayed until the 1930s⁷⁸. The cultivation was in general very labour-intensive given the steep hillsides and dispersed vineyards. This made mechanization difficult and human specificity high, which explains why, despite the contracts being annual, farms were worked by the same families for generations.⁷⁹

Winemaking was originally carried out by both sharecroppers and landowners, but as wine quality and demand increased, it was carried out by the sharecroppers in the central winery under the supervision of the *fattore*, where the division took place.⁸⁰ As the Chianti wine is a mixture of different varieties, it required great control. Sharecroppers often took out loans with the *fattore* against commercial crops such as wine, which were settled annually after the harvest.⁸¹

The landowners of the *fattorie* are closely linked to the production and export of Chianti, benefitted from their greater economies of scale in wine making, their capacity to produce a sufficient variety of grapes, and the advantages in marketing.⁸² Despite the growing criticism in the 19th century of the *mezzadria podereale* because of its supposed inefficiency and conservatism, the number of sharecroppers increased as a share of the labour force, from 42% in 1882 to 55% in 1911. Just as in the Penedès, cooperatives did not compete with the private wineries in sharecropping regions.⁸³

In the same way as Catalonia, the major conflicts in the 1920s are generally attributed to the need for greater labour inputs, higher expenses in chemical to fight phylloxera (which reduced sharecropper's income), as well as

⁷⁸ Promiscuous cultivation was greatest in the Chianti production areas. Yearbook, 1939, 272. Promiscuous cultivation as a way to reduce erosion in Dario Gaggio, *The Shaping of Tuscany: Landscape and Society between Tradition and Modernity*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 2017), 116.

⁷⁹ Evictions were very rare, although there was some mobility within the *fattorie* itself. Snowden, *The Fascist Revolution*, 30.

⁸⁰ Biagioli, "La mezzadria podereale", 77–8

⁸¹ Biagioli, "La mezzadria podereale", 85

⁸² Giulia Meloni, and John Swinnen, Trade and terroir. The political economy of the world's first geographical indications, *Food Policy*, 81, (2018), 1–20 It was marketed at higher prices, (the price was double that of ordinary wine in the 1930s, Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *Annuario Statistico*, 406–7.

⁸³ The competitive advantages in Biagioli, "La mezzadria podereale", 63–64

their loss of independence on the better managed estates.⁸⁴ Moreover, the prohibition on working outside the *poderale* became costlier as industrial wages increased.⁸⁵ The most important conflicts occurred in Florence, in 1906, and after the First World War, with the triumph of the socialist party in more than half of the Tuscan municipalities. Their demands included shifting the cost of chemicals to the landowners or the ending of payments for using their processing facilities.⁸⁶ The expenditure on copper sulphate and sulphide to combat phylloxera could represent up to 15% of the value of the harvest in the first decades of the 20th century, increasing the debt of the sharecroppers to their landowner.⁸⁷ However, in contrast with Catalonia, Tuscan sharecroppers wanted a greater participation in the management of the *fattorie*, keeping the organizational advantages of large scale processing.⁸⁸

CONCLUSIONS.

Although sharecropping was rare in viticulture, it was widely found in the important European regions of Beaujolais, Chianti, and the Penedès, where the contract showed significant capacity to adapt to the profound changes in viticulture between 1830 and 1930. Geographical restrictions made viticulture especially labour intensive and limited mechanization in these regions, and explain the importance of human asset specificity and long-term contracts. Furthermore, landowners in the three regions centralized wine-making, allowing them to enjoy both the advantages of greater economies of scale, and the possibility to control the grape quality of their tenants. However, their success was linked to being located in vicinity of Lyon, Florence and Barcelona. These were their main markets and were sufficiently close to the vineyards to avoid the need to create sophisticated marketing networks to sell their premium wines. By contrast, if the local cooperative wineries enjoyed the economies of

⁸⁴ Biagioli, “La mezzadria poderale”, 65

⁸⁵ Luporini and Parigi, “Multi-task Sharecropping”, 455

⁸⁶ Ministero, 1947, 221; Biagioli, “La mezzadria poderale”, 92. and 66

⁸⁷ An average of the expenditure of 4 large *fattorie* at the beginning of the 20th century, in Galassi, “Stasi I Svilupo”, 324.

⁸⁸ The sharecroppers’ demands in Snowden, *The Fascist Revolution*, 44–7.

scale to create these networks, they failed to create the economic incentives to improve grape quality, and their managers had problems to make autonomous marketing decisions.

A further consideration is the increasing long term instability in the day-to-day relations between landlords and vine growers. The combination of low wine prices, growing capital requirements, higher opportunity costs of labour (because of industrialization) and the difficulties for exit, led to collective action to improve contractual conditions. In particular, the autonomy of sharecroppers, a characteristic of these long term contacts, was threatened by the greater involvement of landlords in the management of their estates. As a result, the nature of vertical co-operation and integration associated with the successful wine production, especially in Catalonia or Tuscany, limited the possibilities to negotiate changes and devise alternative contracts.

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